

small businesses and other individuals an opportunity to pool together to try to make health insurance coverage more affordable and accessible so more people can have health insurance. We can use this to build on some of the great reforms we passed as recently as 2003 which allow people to create such things as health savings accounts, which has given rise to the whole notion of consumer-driven health care.

Someone pointed out to me not too long ago that we know more about the used cars we buy than we do about the health care services we purchase because we can find out about quality, we can find out about price, and we can compare. The fact is, the American consumer is largely denied that opportunity, and we need to provide that sort of transparency so that patients can compare and make the best decision for their needs and their family, and which, not coincidentally, will help bring down the price of health care services because people will be able to then pay out of their health savings account. Obviously, that will have an impact on utilization rates as well.

I thank the Chair for his patience and willingness to assume that position so I could say these few words both out of pride for my State and for the successful experiment we have conducted in Texas which has now served as a wonderful model for the United States going forward to try to address a true crisis. But not only a crisis, it is something that, once we address this and hopefully pass this medical liability legislation, Senator ENZI's health care bill which will provide greater access to health insurance and provide people with a better life, that we will ultimately have done something good that the American people can say: I know my Senator and my Congressman are up in Washington, and they are actually listening to what we are saying. They are actually dealing with the great issues that affect the quality of my life and my family's life, and that we will have done something of which we can be very proud.

I yield the floor.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

In December, 2004, a 30-year-old man was beaten outside a restaurant in downtown Seattle, WA. The man received a concussion, split lip, loose teeth, a black eye, and bruises from being kicked while on the ground. The victim believed his assailants beat him

up because they thought that he was gay.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

35TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMTRAK

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Amtrak. When the first Amtrak Clocker train left New York, bound for New Jersey and Philadelphia, on May 1, 1971, it ushered in a new era of passenger rail travel in the United States. Millions of passengers from every corner of America can attest to the fact that Amtrak remains a vital part of our nationwide transportation network, and I firmly believe it's imperative that we not just preserve our nation's passenger rail system, but also develop it.

Amtrak's transformation from a tiny initiative with only 25 workers and widespread expectations of failure, to a successful national corporation with 19,700 employees in nearly every state, is one of the great success stories I've witnessed during my many years in the Senate. Every day approximately 68,000 travelers rely on Amtrak as an effective alternative to the hassles and delays of air travel, and the increasingly prohibitive gas costs and traffic congestion associated with highway travel.

Amtrak remains enormously important to my home State of New Jersey. Last year, for instance, over 3.4 million people boarded or exited an Amtrak train at the six rail stations in New Jersey, and nearly 1,700 New Jersey residents worked for Amtrak during this same time period. Approximately 110 Amtrak trains travel through my home State every day; this service, combined with the many rail lines that New Jersey Transit, SEPTA, PATH, and PATCO operate, truly makes New Jersey a national leader in passenger rail. I am immensely proud of this distinction—as all New Jerseyans are—and it would not be possible without Amtrak. The benefits of such a system are immense; without rails, our State would suffocate under extreme highway and airport traffic congestion. On Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service between Washington, DC, and Boston, MA, which stops at several points in New Jersey, the trains carry as many people as 75,000 fully loaded Boeing 757 jets each year. By contrast, there are only 102 flights between downtown Washington, DC, and the three New York City-area airports on an average weekday.

On December 11, 2000, the first Acela Express service began on the Northeast Corridor. As one of the leading proponents of high-speed rail in the Con-

gress, it has been a marvel to see the success of this train and its example of how high-speed rail can be successful in our country. I am a frequent rider of the Acela Express between New Jersey and Washington, and I appreciate the service for the same reasons that many others do: it is efficient, it is comfortable, it is cost-effective, and it is convenient. Most tellingly, the Acela Express's operations do not require a subsidy, and I expect its ridership to continue to grow as others discover the advantages of this remarkable train.

Mr. President, it is unfortunate that despite the great successes of Amtrak, it is necessary for the many defenders of the system myself included to fight for its survival at every turn. There are many within the Bush administration—and within the House and Senate—who would like nothing better than to see Amtrak wither and die, stranding millions of travelers in the process. We cannot let this happen, and as long as I am a member of the Senate, I will not let this happen. I will continue to work with a diverse set of colleagues on both sides of the aisle who realize the advantages of providing options for travelers and having a balanced national transportation system.

In short, Mr. President, I salute Amtrak for its achievements, and I extend the railroad and its employees, who are the backbone of the railroad's operation, warmest wishes for continued success through the next 35 years.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, due to the untimely loss of my beloved sister, Marilyn "Nubs" Hatch Kuch, I have been necessarily absent for a portion of the debate and votes on Wednesday, May 3 and Thursday, May 4, 2006.

Concerning the votes I missed, if I were present I would have voted as follows: nay for amendment No. 3616, striking funding to States based on their production of certain types of crops, livestock and/or dairy products; nay for amendment No. 3673, providing funds for assessments of critical reservoirs and dams in the State of Hawaii; nay for amendment No. 3601, allocating \$1,000,000 for the monitoring of waters off the coast of the State of Hawaii; yea for amendment No. 3704, allocating \$20,000,000 from the AmeriCorps program to the Veterans Health Administration for medical facilities; yea for final passage of H.R. 4939, the Fiscal Year 2006 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery; yea for Executive Calendar No. 617, the nomination of Brian M. Cogan of New York to be the U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of New York; and yea for Executive Calendar No. 618, the nomination of Thomas M. Golden of Pennsylvania to be the U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. None of these votes would have changed the final outcome.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday I was pleased to introduce,

along with 21 of my Senate colleagues from diverse political, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds, a bipartisan and bicameral bill to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has had a very busy year. Last Fall, while the House was beginning its hearings on the Voting Rights Act, we were just finishing our hearings and final vote on the nomination of John G. Roberts, Jr. to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Soon after that, we began preparing for hearings on the nomination of Harriet Miers to replace Justice O'Connor on the Supreme Court. When that nomination was withdrawn, we had to start over with a new nominee, Samuel Alito. We held hearings for Justice Alito in January, and since then, we've had a very full schedule which has included several hearings on the legality of the President's domestic spying program and, of course, countless hours marking up comprehensive immigration legislation.

So, we are just now beginning our work on the Voting Rights Act. But our relatively late start here in the Senate should not be interpreted to suggest that the Voting Rights Act is not a priority compared to the other matters we have had to address. To the contrary, the actions we take with respect to the Voting Rights Act—like the actions we took during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings—will dramatically impact the rights and lives of American citizens for generations to come.

The Voting Rights Act has been hailed as the single most effective piece of civil rights legislation that we have ever passed. The Act does not simply guarantee the right to vote, but it ensures the effective exercise of that fundamental right. In 1965, when President Johnson signed the bill into law, there were only 300 minorities elected to State, local, or federal office. Today, just 4 decades later, there are some 10,000 minorities serving as elected public officials.

Leaders from both parties, including President Bush and Attorney General Gonzales, have said they support reauthorization. Today, leaders from both parties of both houses of Congress have come together to introduce this reauthorization bill.

The magic of the Voting Rights Act is apparent in my own hometown, New York City. New York City is one of the most diverse cities in the country, and the Voting Rights Act has been extremely effective in ensuring that all of our citizens are able to participate equally in the political process. But many of the Act's successes in New York have come only since the last time we renewed its major provisions.

For example, the first African American mayor of New York City wasn't elected until 1989, and the first African American wasn't elected to statewide office until 1994. In 2002, the first Asian American was elected to the New York City Council. And finally, just last

year, a mayoral candidate became the first Latino to win his party's nomination.

These strides are important, but they are too few and too recent to say for certain that the goals of the Voting Rights Act have been met. There is still a lot of work to do, and as a member of the Judiciary Committee, I look forward to reviewing the evidence and testimony that is going to be presented at our hearings in the weeks to come, and to working with my colleagues from both Houses and on both sides of the aisle to ensure that this bill is passed well before the deadline.

SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITIES PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT

Mr. SUNUNU. Mr. President, I rise to speak on legislation I introduced yesterday, the Small Public Housing Authorities Paperwork Reduction Act. This legislation is an important step toward alleviating some of the burden placed on our Nation's smallest public housing authorities. PHAs play an important role in meeting the housing needs of the Nation's low-income individuals, families, seniors, and the disabled. Unfortunately, they face a challenge when balancing the housing needs of those they serve with the, oftentimes, consuming and duplicative reporting requirements placed upon them. The legislation I am introducing today seeks to address just one annual report that will free up a significant amount of time and resources, allowing housing authorities to focus more attention on the individuals they serve.

Specifically, this legislation would exempt PHAs with 500 or fewer public housing units and any number of section 8 vouchers from the requirement of submitting an annual plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The 1992 Public Housing Reform Act required PHAs to submit separate 5-year and annual plans to HUD. The redundancy of the annual plan process creates an undue burden for small PHAs by requiring them to provide identical information to HUD every 12 months. For example, an annual plan outlines a PHA's goals, policies, eligibility guidelines, and other information that is unlikely to change from year to year. Under this bill, small PHAs would only be required to submit their 5-year plan—a more appropriate timeline for reevaluating their goals and policies—to better allow them to use scarce human and financial resources to directly serve the needs of their communities. Additionally, this bill would only exempt those PHAs that have demonstrated compliance with HUD regulations. PHAs that have been designated by HUD as troubled would not be exempted from the annual plan.

It is also important to note that PHAs would still be required to conduct an annual meeting in which residents and community members are in-

cluded in the planning and development of a housing authority's objectives and priorities. My legislation makes certain that residents have an opportunity to comment on any changes to the goals, objectives, and policies of the agency. Housing authorities are also required to notify tenants of any proposed changes at least 45 days before the public hearing occurs. The annual public meeting, in combination with State and local public meeting requirements, will continue to ensure that any changes made to a PHA's policies are well vetted, with particular attention paid to resident concerns.

PHA directors in my State and across the country contend that this legislation is a significant step toward reducing the excessive paperwork and reporting requirements that burden their agencies. I agree, that by mitigating some of this burden, we will allow PHAs to focus more time and energy for their mission-driven service to their housing residents. Not all PHAs have the time, staff, or resources available to complete these annual plans. Some PHAs have had to hire outside consultants to complete the plans, a costly expense for these agencies. Given the fiscal constraints PHAs are facing, it is more important now than ever to give housing authorities the flexibility needed to work within these budget constraints. This legislation is one simple way Congress can assist in providing needed relief to PHAs.

My colleague, Congressman RANDY NEUGEBAUER, has introduced similar legislation which passed in the House of Representatives on December 13, 2005, by a vote of 387 to 2. The overwhelming support in the House for such an initiative makes very clear the need for this type of relief. I am hopeful my colleagues in the Senate will also see the value of providing paperwork reduction for those agencies that have demonstrated their ability to comply with current regulations.

Finally, I am pleased to have the support of the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and local agencies across my State in this effort. New Hampshire's PHAs continue to do an exceptional job of providing for the housing needs of those who need it most. State and local housing agencies perform an invaluable community function by securing housing for families and individuals in need. I remain committed to working further with them throughout this legislative process and to reducing unnecessary federal regulatory burdens for housing.

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, this week has been designated Cover the Uninsured Week. It is week that we mark every year to spur our Nation to act to address the growing number of Americans who lack health insurance. Sadly, that this has become an annual event shows that we have made little